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ABSTRACT

This project emphasized the writing-reading connection in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) curriculum, noting the effects of integrating nonfiction reading about culture into writing tasks and investigating reading-for-writing activities that functioned as an extension from the EFL classrooms to the outside world. The project occurred in a freshman English reading and writing class at a Taiwanese university. Students were taught skills in research, notetaking, summarizing, paraphrasing, synthesizing, writing for an audience, writing in a neutral tone, using the computer for word processing and information searching, and APA documentation style. A theme on Chinese, aboriginal, or other cultures was established to enhance cross-cultural communication and examine how cultural background and literacy context affected reading comprehension and writing skills. Students collected data and created a pamphlet using these skills, which functioned as an extension of the EFL classroom into the real world. Critical thinking in both reading and writing was facilitated and emphasized during all the reading and writing processes. Teacher and peer feedback were an integral part of the process. Students improved their own proficiencies as they provided feedback to peers. These various interactive procedures were very helpful in students' learning processes. (Contains 10 references.) (SM)

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The Writing-Reading Connection:

A Pamphlet Project at Yang-Ming University

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The purpose of this study is to provide a practical connection between writing and reading through a pamphlet project done in the author's freshman English reading and writing class at National Yang-Ming University in fall semester, 1999. After teaching different genres, a project integrating nonfiction reading into writing tasks was created to help these students put theories into practice. The methodology is a combination of both process and product approaches. The process of data collection and product of pamphlet in this project were actually functioning as an extension from the EFL classrooms to the real world. The project aims at teaching research skills, note-taking skills, summarizing, paraphrasing, and synthesizing skills, writing for an audience, writing in a neutral tone, and using the computer for word-processing and information search, and finally the APA documentation style. A theme on Chinese, aboriginal, or other cultures was established to enhance cross-cultural communication and to examine how cultural background and literacy context affect reading comprehension and writing performance. Critical thinking in both reading and writing was facilitated and emphasized during all the processes of reading and writing.

1. INTRODUCTION:

The relationships between writing and reading have been much discussed by researchers from different areas. In this study, the focuses are on the writing-reading connection in EFL curriculum as well as the reading-for-writing activities functioning as an extension from the EFL classrooms to the outside world. The effect of integrating nonfiction reading into the writing tasks in the EFL classrooms will also be investigated.

2. CONTEXT:

The pamphlet project was done in the author's freshman English reading and writing classes at National Yang-Ming University, where all English classes

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are electives and students can choose any English class they like to improve their English proficiencies. The course length is one semester (about 15 weeks), with two hours of class time per week, taking 35 students maximally in every class.

The students in my classes were freshmen from different departments such as medicine, dentistry, life science, biomedical science and technology, radiological science and technology, physical therapy, and nursing, etc. They were about 17 to 18 years old, just graduated from high schools and passed the country's Joint Entrance Exam. Most of them are native-speakers of Mandarin Chinese and had learned six years of English at school before they entered this university while five of them are overseas Chinese students mostly from south-eastern Asian countries.

The constraint of class time was one big problem. As the English classes are intensive in nature, in doing this project students had to spend a lot of extra hours searching for materials, scanning or copying the graphs into their texts, designing their formats and covers, and revising over and over again during the whole process of writing.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THIS PAMPHLET PROJECT:

Using nonfiction readings, this study aims at connecting the EFL reading and writing classrooms with the real world, as well as enhancing intercultural communication by teaching the following skills:

- searching for information from various resources, including interviews and the use of the Internet
- reading for specific information
- interviewing people
- taking notes
- summarizing, paraphrasing, and synthesizing when using others' writing
- writing for an audience and in a neutral tone
- critical thinking in reading and writing
- using the computer for word-processing and format designing
- copying and inserting graphs from the Internet or books onto the text
- using the APA style for referencing and documentation

4. ABOUT THE PAMPHLET PROJECT:

4A. Assessment of Students' Reading/Writing Problems and Needs:

In the first class meeting, a written survey was conducted to assess students' previous experience, problems, needs, and abilities in EFL reading and writing. Quite a few of them had unpleasant experience in learning English. The problems of their reading mainly resulted from the insufficiency of vocabulary and the lack of background knowledge of the reading texts. As to writing, some had difficulties in writing down what they had in mind in English, and some were discouraged by their former teacher's negative comments. In revision, most of them only knew to revise in the most elementary level--fixing punctuation, doing a spell-check, and a quick read-through. Still, some had pleasant experience in writing because their teachers praised them and displayed their writing to the whole class. In a word, the teacher's teaching method, attitude, and the classroom atmosphere were major factors affecting the students' learning.

4B. Textbook and Materials:

The textbook was *Write to Be Read: Reading, Reflection, and Writing*, (1998), written by William R. Smalzer, published by Cambridge University Press. Influenced by the whole language approach, this textbook focuses on meaning, rather than discrete skills, in both reading and writing, with its methodology being a blend of both the process and product approaches to writing. The text also emphasizes summarizing and paraphrasing skills when using others' writing. The "Peer Feedback Guidelines," "Paragraph Assessment Guidelines," or "Essay Assessment Guidelines" at the end of each chapter, and the "Complete Essay Assessment Guidelines" in Appendix B are all very handy in students' revision processes.

In addition to the textbook, other materials like sample pamphlets and articles describing customs in other cultures were used to give students a feel for what should be covered in their pamphlets and the proper tone in this type of writing. Due to availability, the materials students obtained through their own search were mostly from the Internet while some information was obtained from interviews with experts or the people in some specific walks of life; only a very small portion of information was obtained from books. Interviews added credibility to their evidence in supporting the points they were making.

4C. Resources and Institutional Support:

After students decided their topic, a library tour was taken to orient them to the use of the library and its many resources. The use of the Internet was very convenient and its constant availability was the greatest support from our university. In addition, a computer lab was arranged for our class time. However, the printer and scanner in the computer lab had very poor qualities, so for best results students had to seek help from their friends or go to print shops outside the university. This was inconvenient and costly for them, but in the coming semester, this problem will be overcome since the university will provide necessary equipment for our classes.

5. PROCEDURES OF THE PAMPHLET PROJECT:

Starting with the finding of a suitable topic through freewriting and peer conferencing, this project combines reading with writing to teach research skills and writing skills.

5A. Why Cultural Theme?

While the reading-for-writing activities were designated to investigate the cognitive perspectives of the reading and writing connection, the cultural theme was established to examine social perspectives of reading in the EFL writing classrooms to see how cultural background and literacy context affect reading comprehension and writing performance. The topics chosen were about Chinese, aboriginal, Malay, Indonesian, or Indian culture, e.g., the Chinese New Year, Chinese Weddings, Child Marriage in India, the Art of Chinese Calligraphy, the Chinese Art of Tea-drinking, the Chinese Door Gods, the Ghost Festival, A Traditional Taiwanese Funeral, Tombs in Taiwan, Tomb-Sweeping Day, and the Chinese Thanksgiving Day, etc.

5B. Finding the Right Topic:

Using freewriting, brainstorming, or clustering, students generated ideas for the topic. Then, they exchanged writing with peers to find out whether the topic would interest the audience and in what ways. Here the peers were acting as the hidden audience whom students were told to keep in mind in their writing. They took notes of their peers' questions about the topic and added their own.

Next, on their private journals, they did some freewriting or brainstorming for about 10 to 15 minutes to elicit more ideas about the topic. In these

activities, students just jotted down whatever that came to their mind without worrying about grammar, so they had a very smooth writing experience. No dictionaries were used in this type of activity since the use of them would interrupt their flow of thought; moreover, they were supposed to be focusing on ideas only, not vocabulary. At this stage, some students were so indulged in writing that they asked for more time.

5C. Library Tour:

Then, with the potential topics and questions on hand, the whole class visited the library for a pre-arranged guided tour. After getting to know the facilities and resources of the library, students began to search for materials they needed.

5D. Focus of Writing:

Influenced by the whole language approach, the focus of pamphlet writing and revision was on meaning and organization of the information, rather than surface level errors. This conception was new to the students, and they started to feel completely different and energetic in writing the text. Meanwhile, when they read the materials they searched from different sources, they also learned to focus on the exploration of the meaning of the information.

5E. Writing Skills:

The writing skills employed included topic-sentence writing, thesis statement writing, note-taking, summarizing, paraphrasing, and synthesizing skills. The ability of finding topic sentences and thesis statement in reading texts is crucial in the students' writing abilities because in so doing they will perform better in catching the major ideas in the reading text and transforming them into their summaries, paraphrases, and synthesis. Note-taking skills were first demonstrated and practiced in class. Students learned these skills and practiced them on their materials, and later typed them on the computer. A neutral tone was employed to indicate objective stance in informative writing.

5F. Interviewing skills:

Students also learned to interview experts to gather material to reflect on

and write about. The process of interviewing is essentially the same as our conversations with friends, except it is more formal when we interview people. During the interview, students asked questions and took notes. After the interview, they made generalizations about what they have learned and support the generalizations with specific evidence, that is, material obtained from the interview (Mlynarczyk and Haber, 1998). To ensure accuracy and to make the organization of information easier, students were encouraged to use a walkman to record the interview if the interviewee agreed.

5G. Writing the Position Paper:

After peer conferencing and the search for materials, students wrote up a position paper to explain the reasons why they chose the topic, the questions they were going to investigate, and how they would find out the answers to satisfy the curiosity of the audience. Sources of information came from the Internet, books, journals, magazines, articles, and interviews with people, etc. In response, the teacher asked more questions about the subject matters or modified the questions to lead them to the proper direction of content.

5H. Peer Conferencing and Student-teacher Conferencing—Creating a Friendly and Supportive Atmosphere:

As there were 35 students in the class, students were paired or grouped when holding peer conferences to promote efficiency and interactions among the student writers and their peers serving as the hidden audience in writing. The feedback checklists at the end of each chapter in the textbook were used during the review processes. Peer comments provided great help to the student writers. The teacher gave feedback after reading students' position paper and drafts. These activities were supportive in nature and relieved students' tension in their learning processes. This emotional factor played an important positive role in motivating students' learning.

5I. Computer Software and Necessary Skills:

Microsoft Word was used for the production of pamphlet. To create a two-sided three-fold pamphlet, first click on "Format," under which there is a choice of functions. Then choose "Column" and hit the third option, which contains 3 columns in the format. With this done, students began to type their

text, leaving the space for the cover empty. They returned to design the cover after finishing the text and inserting graphs into it. Finally, select functions from "Printing" to get the expected result of horizontal, two-sided prints. Students learned to copy graphs from the Web, or scan graphs from other sources, insert them into the text, change the size of the graphs, and then arrange them in the proper position with very brief captions below or beside the graphs.

5J. The Use of the APA Documentation Style:

Illegality of plagiarism was cautioned, and a guide for writing research papers in the American Psychological Association (APA) documentation style was provided for students to follow.

5K. A Real Test to the Pamphlet—An Extension to the Outside World:

Upon completion of the third draft, with cover designed and graphs inserted, students brought the pamphlet to the class and invited peer reviews and comments. With peer feedback and their own judgment, they made revisions accordingly in the computer lab. Finally, with the revised fourth draft of the pamphlet, they went on streets for the most exciting step—finding foreigners to read their pamphlets and give comments. Students were thrilled when receiving praises from the audience—the foreigners! They especially appreciated hearing questions from the foreigners because they could then revise the text to achieve full cross-cultural communication. Grades were given based on criteria like richness of content, summarizing, paraphrasing, and synthesizing skills, clarity of writing, the neutral tone of writing, and creativity of the format design.

5L. Students' Feedback to this Project:

Despite the hardships they encountered, feeling a great sense of accomplishment was the most common feedback from the student writers after they completed the pamphlet. They reported that this was the first time they ever took the initiative in and control of their learning, and they were amazed by how much they have learned in doing this project. They thought the hard work was well worth it because this project was very challenging and beneficial to their holistic learning of English. They appreciated the unique and creative teaching method, the training of critical thinking, the learning of research skills, the friendly and supportive classroom atmosphere, and the way the teacher and

the peers gave feedback. Learning to use the computer and the Internet was another pleasant experience that they had greatly enjoyed.

6. THEORETICAL BASIS:

Reading was recognized as the basis for writing, especially in academic settings. In his whole language approach to literacy development, Goodman (1986) argues that reading and writing develop together. Carson (1993) and Kucer (1985) claim that it is beneficial to integrate L2 reading and writing in the same classroom, and that these two skills draw upon the same cognitive text world. Hence, when L2 students are not reading to write, they are just practicing reading. In the metacognition theory, reading-to-write changes the reading process because it enhances the reader's engagement in reading and therefore entails changes in the metacognitive knowledge (Sternglass, 1988). Metacognition was explicit in the students' reading process in this study when they read to summarize, paraphrase, and synthesize.

From the 1980s, writing researchers started to regard writing as a kind of communication, and they emphasized students' writing processes and the messages they want to communicate to the audience. The more communication is achieved, the more successful the writing classroom will be. As Reid (1993) puts it, the degree of interactions and communication between the writer and the reader depends on their shared experiences, schemata, and cueing systems. In this project, the interactions and communication were functioning as a bridge linking the EFL classrooms and the real world.

6A. The Writing-Reading Connection:

This study focuses on the reading-for-writing activities in the EFL classrooms since many researchers in different areas have investigated the reading-writing connection in L1 and L2 situations, yet little research has been done in the EFL situations.

The methodology used to examine the reading-to-write activities in the EFL classrooms in this study was a blend of both process and product approaches. To write the pamphlet, students read extensively for different information on one topic of their choice and then selected and organized information they needed in writing. The writing involved very complex cognitive processes. This integration of reading into writing enabled students to develop both critical thinking and critical literacy, i.e., "the ability to transform information for their

own purposes in reading and to synthesize their prior knowledge with another text in writing" (Carson, 1993). In arguing for the use of reading and writing together in second language classrooms, she further points out that

> theory-practice connections are clearest from the perspective of reading and writing as collaborative events. ...Reading for writing is functional and meaningful because it creates a purpose for reading as well as a real-world text base for writing. Furthermore, reading-to-write also underscores the fact that most writing, particularly in academic contexts, depends to a large extent on reading input—either directly from source texts, or indirectly from background knowledge, which itself results from experience with texts (pp.99-100).

In facilitating students' acquisition of reading and writing skills, according to Eskey (1993), the first thing the teacher should do is to stimulate students' creativity. In this pamphlet project, students had great flexibility in exhibiting their creativity in their reading and writing processes through the selection of the materials for their subject matter, as well as the design of the organization, format and the cover. When their creativity was stimulated, they felt the urge to move on, both in reading and writing of their text.

By reading materials consistently on a same subject, students built up their knowledge about the subject matter. Also, as Spack (1985) states, these student readers will acquire "new knowledge structures born of reading other texts on the same subject" when they return to the text they read earlier. Leki (1993) further argues that with this new knowledge, the readers returning to the original text will have a new understanding. Hence, as the EFL students in this project moved on with more materials about that same subject, they could read more easily and comfortably and finally became able to enjoy the reading act. The pleasure of getting the hang of the subject matter further motivated them to read more in quantity and in depth. This was helpful to them in that they learned more vocabulary and got more understanding of the subject matter, and that it became easier for them to think critically about what they were reading and writing, and finally they were able to designate proper questions to investigate in their pamphlet.

6B. Why Integrating Nonfiction Reading into Writing Tasks?

This project was designed to function as an extension to the real world outside of our classroom; therefore, searching for and reading of non-fiction materials describing the real world would increase students' interest in reading. Besides, interviewing people provided another connection to the outside world.

6C. Peer Feedback:

Peer conferencing was conducted all through the process of pamphlet writing. It made the writing an interactive and social activity between the writer and the reader as "the text is where a specific reader and writer meet" (Leki, 1993). Since English was the only language used in the classroom, in peer conferencing students practiced all four skills. It developed their whole language proficiency. Meanwhile, peer conferencing served as the link between the writer and the reader (the outside world).

Writing is a recursive process. Good writers revise their writing all the time, even till the last minute, and revision can take place at various times during the process of writing a text. In reviewing a writing text, ideas came first. Sentences and surface level errors were only checked at the very last step of the project. Students were instructed to give feedback in a very nice way; for example, the peers expressed their doubts or points of view in the form of questions and sometimes in written form.

6D. Teacher Feedback:

Individual student-teacher conferencing about the results of position paper and first, second, and third drafts of the pamphlet was very helpful in students' revision process. The focus was on the student writer's intention to express specific ideas to the audience and whether the goal has been reached or not, and if not, how to improve the communication skills in writing. In student-teacher conferences, students felt the direct attention from the teacher and became more motivated to do it better. Surface level errors were left out until the last draft as it would be misleading to focus on elementary levels of errors while the attention should be on meaning and organization of information. There were very drastic changes in the structures and contents in these drafts.

7. FINDINGS OF THIS STUDY:

To prevent plagiarism and to examine how well they can handle

summarizing, paraphrasing, and synthesizing of the reading texts, students in this pamphlet project were required to turn in copies of the original reading texts. Through extensive reading, students wrote up their pamphlets. Compared to the writing in the first week's assessment, their writing proficiency were obviously enhanced, let alone their reading proficiency. Therefore, the effect of reading-for-writing was justified in this EFL environment.

Corresponding to Johns' (1985) findings about the different summarizing abilities of "adept" and "underprepared" native-speaking students and Sarig's (1993) similar findings about a university student's study-summary writing processes, the adept and underprepared EFL university student writers in this study also had different performances in their summarizing abilities. Adept students in this project summarized and paraphrased more efficiently than the underprepared students, and they used more combinations and macropropositions in their summaries. As to synthesizing skills, the difference in performance between adept students and underprepared students was highly correlated to that of the summarizing and paraphrasing skills. In this study, proficient student writers were most likely proficient readers, and they performed better in reading-to-write activities, especially in synthesizing text since it involved much more complex cognition.

8. CONCLUSION:

By reading nonfiction materials on one subject about culture consistently, students built up relevant knowledge, and their background knowledge and literacy context of culture did benefit their reading comprehension and writing performance. Unlike the traditional classrooms, in this project the teacher provided guidance by asking questions, and a supportive and creative classroom atmosphere was created to relieve students' anxiety in learning and to elicit their creativity. The use of computer and the Internet was a new and very practical experience to these freshmen. The various interactive procedures turned out to be very helpful in the students' learning processes. Both teacher feedback and peer feedback had played important roles in this project. They learned to review each other's writing and give valuable positive comments. In helping peers, they also improved their own proficiencies in the English language. In a nutshell, the whole study provides connections between the learning of reading and writing and the real world in the EFL environment.

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